

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
May 2, 2002

Members Present: Alan Root, Sara Wolff, Ben Bowditch, Al Chevan, Jean Haggerty, Doris Mundo,

Staff Present: John Clobridge, Nancy Pagano, Barbara Slovin,

COA Minutes

Minutes were accepted as read.

Senior Trust Treasurer's Report

There was no treasurer's report as Doris Holden was not present. Jim Becker also could not attend this meeting, but Alan will explore if he can come in June.

John asked for reimbursement of \$92.82 for gas for the van and this was voted.

Nancy announced that the Senior Center had received donations of \$150 from the Amherst Women's Club and \$750 from the new branch of the Greenfield Savings Bank now located on University Drive.

Budget Update

John reported that so far the only official cut to the COA FY03 budget is \$2,000, but the Town Manager has spoken about further cuts to human services departments, possibly as much as \$5,000, which may impact part-time employees. John recommends the scheduling of a special COA meeting when more is known. Sara concurred and spoke about the need for briefing and update before speaking at Town Meeting. Isaac wants to know what the worst case scenario is. Doris feels that it is important to not use scare tactics and to support staff when job cuts are proposed. Scare tactics are pitting people against each other in the political process surrounding the budget. John expects the state budget will come out around May 15-16th and he wants to put together a mailing for COA members the week before. Alan pointed out that Town Meeting will need to conditionally approve a budget w/o all the information about state monies to cities and towns. The COA will meet on May 14th (Tuesday) at 10 AM to discuss the budget. It is important to keep in mind that the COA figures won't be realistic when this meeting is held.

Isaac wants the COA to send a statement to the Selectboard to ask them to contact our legislators to speak out against cuts to the Town. Doris asked if the COA is encouraging seniors to write objecting to cuts. Isaac and Doris will work together to send the letter to the Selectboard asking them to participate in a forum to discuss this.

Public Transportation for Seniors

Jean is having a meeting at Ann Whalen tonight to discuss proposed cuts to PVRTA's routes. Most AW residents don't have cars and they are primarily seniors with disabilities who rely on PVRTA for rides. Some residents are mothers with children who need transportation. The Amity Street shuttle and three other routes are in jeopardy. There is a meeting tomorrow at 1 PM in Bangs to discuss the cuts to healthcare and transportation. Isaac asks whether the Town can put up an additional \$10,000 to fill the gap. He posed the question: with so much money going to the garage, is there equity and fairness in these cuts to public transportation? Doris suggests getting figures from the Public Transportation Committee representatives to look at how many people rely on the buses to get to work and to look at the \$10,000 as an investment in people. Isaac may ask for consideration of the Public Transportation article at Town Meeting to be delayed to give the COA a chance to prepare a statement. Al Chevan suggests finding out the ridership numbers.

Fitness Center/Wellness Committee

Alan cited the example of Easthampton which started its fitness center for \$12,000 and suggested that we could start ours in a scaled back version with a few machines. Sara reported the opinion of the Wellness Criteria Committee that more research is needed before going forward. Maura Plante's survey of area fitness centers was passed out along with the final version of the health questionnaire. Sara conveyed that the Wellness Criteria Committee wants to have a clear mandate from the COA that the Wellness Committee take the lead in decisions related to the fitness center. Ben Bowditch spoke of his recent personal experience with fitness machines and his opinion that qualified supervision was essential. Doris asked if there is a model of a fitness center in a Senior Center somewhere we can look into to add to our research—Sara offered to help follow up in looking into this. Doris would like to look into grants to fund the fitness center—the proximity of Ann Whalen and Clark House might be a selling factor in seeking foundation support. Alan expressed his frustration that the process of starting our fitness center has been lengthy and he feels sometimes like we make obstacles for ourselves in our planning. Doris will do three things: 1) Look into subsidies for seniors to participate in existing fitness centers; 2) Look into planning grants; and 3) Look

into actual funds to create fitness centers. Isaac suggested Doris join the Wellness Criteria Committee but she declined as she has limited daytime availability. She wants to keep abreast of communications though. The COA reiterated its understanding that the Wellness Criteria Committee is in charge of moving the fitness center forward.

Evaluation of Executive Director

Barbara Melrose could not attend the COA meeting because of family demands and she sent word that the evaluation summaries be sent out by mail. There was discussion about who should get it. Should all COA members and John get a copy? How about the Town Manager? Isaac suggests that an executive session be held to come to a consensus. Immediately afterward John would be invited to join the meeting, hear the evaluation and respond to it. After John responds, then the final report would be submitted to the town manager.

John pointed out that excluding him from any executive session is illegal. He could voluntarily leave, but that remains his choice. Sara felt more discussion is needed and that the issues are sensitive. Doris spoke to the fact that the evaluation process is supposed to promote growth and not be punitive. She discussed her experience in being involved with the school committee's evaluation process and how community input was sought. Doris wants to know about the process and the tool used.

It was decided that the COA will have an executive session with John invited when the completed evaluations are passed out with all associated materials. John could then opt to stay or not and any COA members could do the same. Isaac wants to be sure that when consensus occurs that the document written includes strengths and weaknesses and John's input before it would be given to the Town Manager.

Sara asked whether new members be included. Doris feels that they should and that John should be there as well. She stated that COA members have the responsibility to be candid and upfront if they have any criticisms—there should be no surprises. What is the time frame for this process? The Town Manager will do a September 1st evaluation of John so that gives the COA plenty of time to complete its part of the process. New COA members will be included.

Nominations for Two COA Appointments starting July 1, 2002

There are three appointments to be made as Ben Bowditch, Al Chevan and Alan Root's terms are ending June 30th. Alan wishes to be reappointed. The COA interviewed five people and found all were well qualified. Since Jean and Doris have already been appointed, three nominees remain. The nomination committee esp. liked Liz Massey and Richard Howland. No new names have been submitted. Henry Pierce was not chosen because the committee felt they "already had him" assisting the Senior Center through his extensive involvement with the SALT Council. Liz Massey is retiring as manager of the Clark House and she is very experienced in dealing with issues having to do with seniors. Dick Howland is the attorney who was involved with breaking the Bangs Trust to allow monies to be used for building the community center when it was originally committed to help build a hospital in Amherst. Alan feels his background in answering legal questions would be valuable. Dick is interested in senior employment and is a senior activist. Also he is disabled and he has ideas for mentoring and intergenerational programs. The COA voted to recommend that Alan be reappointed and the Liz Massey and Richard Howland be recommended. Nancy spoke to Henry's strengths and asked the COA to keep him "on the screen" for the future.

Other

- Barbara Slovin invited members to attend the second annual Diversity Luncheon on May 17th.
- Alan Root mentioned that the Amherst Comprehensive Planning Committee will meet on Saturday, May 11th from 9-12:30 PM at the Amherst Regional High School. Anyone wishing to attend should call the Planning Department at 256-4040 to participate.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Nancy Hirsh Pagano